1852
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The BREVITY and VANITY of HUMAN LIFE, Considered and Improved.

A

SERMON

PREACHED AT

St. THOMAS's, SOUTHWARK,

ON

JANUARY the 1st, 1765,

For the BENEFIT of the

FREE-SCHOOL in Gravel-Lane.

By J. TAILER.

Published at the Request of the Managers.

LONDON:
Printed for J. BUCKLAND, at the Buck, in Pater-noster-Row,
MDCCLXV.
[Price Six pence.]

2410

BRITISH MUSEUM

PSALM XC. 9.

------We ſpend our years as a tale that is told.

OF all the creatures in this lower world, man alone ſeems capable of reflecting upon his own being and nature, the deſign of his exiſtence, its limits and duration. In this reſpect, God has taught us more than the beaſts of the earth, and made us wiſer than the fowls of heaven. Theſe graze the green paſture, or ſport in the refreſhing breeze, inſenſible who made them, or who ſupports and provides for them. They come into life, and haſten to its end, totally unconcerned about, and ignorant of, any changes that may paſs upon them. But it is our privilege, that we know life at beſt is ſhort, and ever precarious; that we have a great deal to do whilſt it continues, and that

much depends upon our conduct. This ſuperior knowledge and capacity is given us by our beneficent Creator, that we may take ſuch a ſerious account of life as wiſely to uſe and improve it: that ſuitably impreſſed with its ſhortneſs, frailty, and uncertainty, and the ſpeed with which our years run to their cloſe and period, we may be guarded againſt all trifling delays, and be excited to purſue, with proportionable zeal and activity, the great deſigns for which life was given.

To this purpoſe, thoſe juſt and affecting reflections which the ſacred writer makes upon human life in the Pſalm before us: "We are "carried away as with a flood; we are as a "ſleep: in the morning we are like graſs "which groweth up: in the morning it flouriſh-"eth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut "down and withereth. We ſpend our years "as a tale that is told. The days of our years "are threeſcore years and ten; and if by rea-"ſon of ſtrength they be fourſcore years, yet "is their ſtrength labour and ſorrow: for it "is ſoon cut off, and we fly away." The Pſalmiſt, ſtruck with this ſurvey he had been taking of life, with its brevity, frailty, and vanity, begs for himſelf and others, that they might

might ſo number their days, take ſuch an account of them, as to apply their hearts unto true wiſdom.

We may not be able perhaps preciſely to fix the idea intended in our text; "We ſpend our "years as a tale:" thus our tranſlation has it: it might be as a breath, a word, a tranſient thought or meditation, or a trifling ſtory, or tale: matters which we think little about, make ſmall account of, are but ſlightly impreſſed with, or which are preſently gone, and never to be recalled. Thus conſidering the words, I propoſe

To mention ſome particulars which may ſerve to illuſtrate the repreſentation here given; and at the ſame time ſhew us upon what accounts we may apply it to ourſelves. And after this,

I would point out ſome important leſſons of wiſdom, which ſuch a view of life naturally and forcibly recommends to us.

With reſpect to the repreſentation here given us of human life, and the application we may make of it to ourſelves: it may help us in ſome meaſure to judge of this matter, if we conſider——In how thoughtleſs a manner we generally ſpend our years ——— To what trifling and inſignificant purpoſes ———How quickly

quickly life paſſes on——How imperceptibly, and with what little impreſſion the years of life ſteal away from us——-And——-How unable we are to recall them when they are gone. —— Let us then conſider,

I. In how thoughtleſs a manner the years of life are generally ſpent.

When we have entered life, it is a conſiderable time before we are capable of any ſober thought and buſineſs at all. The mind, equally with the body, has its infancy; is weak and helpleſs; feeble in its efforts, giddy in its motions, and in the exertion of its faculties. We ſcarcely know when the underſtanding begins to open and dawn, or that the union of body and mind takes place: but this we are all ſenſible of; that we ſlowly advance to the regular exerciſe of our reaſon, and that it is not till many years are paſt that it exerts itſelf with any conſiderable ſtrength and vigour.

In the ſtate of infancy and childhood, and generally in youth, we think very little, either with reſpect to our preſervation and ſupport, or our wiſdom and true intereſt; and are obliged to thoſe about us for care and direction in the ſmalleſt and moſt trivial concerns.

Nay, ſo void of thought and rational deſign are we in the firſt ſtages of life, that near a third part of the years of life is generally ſpent before we think with tolerable propriety and conſiſtency about any preſent and temporary intereſt. And happy would it be had we it always to ſay, That as ſoon as we began to be provident for this life, we were thoughtful alſo about that which is to come. But too often we ſee it verified, that " the children " of this world are, in their generation, wiſer " than the children of light." The years of life, be they many or few, are allowed us, by our merciful Creator, to fit us for a more perfect exiſtence; that we might catch them as they riſe, conſecrate them to the honour and ſervice of that God who gave them, and improve them to our own perfection and happineſs. But alas! we too often trifle with them, as if we had them at our own command, or had no important and worthy deſign to tranſact in them. We prize them no more than an idle tale or ſong; they paſs away like that, with as little thought and reflection. In this manner, not only ten, and twenty, but too often thirty, forty, fifty, and ſixty years; and, melancholy thought! thus, by multitudes, the whole of life is ſpent; and thoſe years which ſhould bring

bring forth, and appear with the ripe fruits of ſober thought, uſeful knowledge and experience, grave maxims of wiſdom, and illuſtrious actions, are only years of thoughtleſneſs and diſſipation. If this charge, in its full force, be not applicable to each of us, (as I hope, and perſuade myſelf, it is not) yet, I fear, if the whole of life be ſeriouſly attended to, it will, in this reſpect, furniſh matter of painful concern to us all; — eſpecially when we conſider,

II. To what trifling, and inſignificant purpoſes, our years of life are generally ſpent.

This is a circumſtance connected with, and unavoidably follows from, the former reflection. For if we think little, we ſhall do but little, to any valuable purpoſe. If the years of life are ſpent in a thoughtleſs manner, they muſt be ſpent alſo in a uſeleſs one; for ſober thought and reflection muſt neceſſarily precede all rational purpoſes and conduct. The reaſon why we act no wiſer a part for this, or a future life, is, that we do not duly conſider What we are, for what deſigned, and where our true intereſt and happineſs lies. This (as has been already hinted) is eſpecially the caſe in the firſt years of life; and therefore the firſt

years

years of life are generally uſeleſs and inſignificant. O what trifling, low concerns, employments, deſigns, and intereſts, take up by turns, and fill theſe ſouls of ours, in the ſtages of childhood and youth! What of moment do we then think of? or think of, and purſue to any good account? Much indeed of life is paſt, before we can diſcern our own, or others intereſt; before we can be uſeful to ourſelves or them. In the ſeaſon of youth, the paſſions generally beat high, and the ſenſual appetites are keen and craving. Theſe are of forward growth, and are apt to ſhoot above our intellectual powers; ſo that the outward temptations of the world too eaſily influence us: the judgment then being weak and feeble, is ſoon ſwayed by mere imagination. We have little knowledge and experience, and are often deceived and deluded with outward form and ſhew. Thus the prime and flower of human life is often conſumed to no valuable purpoſe: happy for us, if it be not ſpent to ſome very bad one. But are the years of childhood, and youth, the only years that are ſpent in this inſignificant manner? Glad ſhould I be, could this be fairly admitted. But he, my brethren, who, at any ſeaſon, is thoughtleſs about the great end of his being, whatever be the ſchemes

that

that engage him, or the purſuits and intereſts which take up his thought and time, does, in an affecting ſenſe, come within the repreſentation in our text.

If he ſpends the years of life in ſenſual mirth and pleaſure, in tampering the body, in hunting after worldly honour and greatneſs, or amaſſing to himſelf worldly riches and poſſeſſions; whilſt the rational mind and ſoul, and the nobler intereſts, reſpecting that, are overlooked and neglected: whoever, I ſay, does this, ſpends his years as an idle and inſignificant tale. Having paſſed the earlier ſeaſons of life, it may be, he has laid aſide the toys of childhood, and ſome of the follies of youth; but it is only in exchange for toys and follies of another kind. For, give me leave to aſk, when we are forced to quit this earth and world, of what moment and importance are ſenſual pleaſures, worldly honours, or worldly riches, to an intelligent, immortal ſpirit? Of no more account than children's toys, or than a tale that is told.

If we conſider how negligent mankind generally are, about the moſt valuable concerns of their life and being, about their duty to God, themſelves, and their fellow-creatures; how deſtitute of purpoſe, reſolution, and conduct,

duct, to their own and others welfare! If, I ſay, we conſider theſe things, what abundant reaſon have we in the worſt ſenſe to ſay, "They "ſpend their years as a tale that is told." And may not each of us, in ſome meaſure at leaſt, take up the ſame complaint? If we review the moſt ſerious and compoſed parts of our lives, muſt we not acknowledge we have done little for the honour of God, the intereſt of religion, truth, and goodneſs, and to promote the happineſs of our fellow-creatures, compared with what we might, and ought to have done? and therefore, that much of our time has run to waſte, or has been ſpent only as an inſignificant ſtory, or tale. Again, it may illuſtrate this repreſentation, and we may each of us apply it ourſelves, if we conſider,

III. How ſwiftly life paſſes on. We ſpend our years as a tale, a word, a breath, or as a thought, ſwiftly and haſtily like theſe. The activity and ſpeed with which our time and years paſs on, is, in the moſt emphatical and affecting manner, and by very familiar metaphors, repreſented to us in the language of ſcripture: "My days (ſays Job) are ſwifter "than a weaver's ſhuttle." And of every man he ſays, "He cometh forth like a flower, and "is cut down; he fleeth as a ſhadow, and

" continueth not." The Apoſtle James gives this as a general deſcription of man's life: " It " is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little " time, and then vaniſheth away." The Pſalmiſt ſays, " Behold thou haſt made my " days as an hand's breadth; mine age is as " nothing before thee." In this haſty manner do our years paſs away, in their longeſt duration. Whether we are aſleep or awake, at home or abroad, in the council, the ſhop, or the field; engaged in buſineſs, lolling in indolence, or immerſed in pleaſure; in a word, whether proſecuting laudable deſigns and intereſts, or ſchemes of impurity and wickedneſs, the wings of time are expanded, and it is flying away. The ſun riſes and ſets, the heavenly bodies roll on, and theſe golden meaſurements of time inceſſantly parcel out to us day after day, till our laſt day comes. The ſands glide continually through the glaſs, till they are all run out; and no ſagacity, or ſtrength, we are poſſeſſed of, can detain one ſingle moment of time, or ſtop its career; but be the buſineſs of life done or undone, it paſſes haſtily away. But perhaps we may have ſtill a fuller idea of the expreſſion in our text, if we conſider,

Fourthly, How imperceptibly, and with what little impreſſion our years ſteal away from us.

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The duration of man's life, in a juſt account of it, is not exactly the time in which he breathes, but that which he enjoys, and improves: it is that meaſure of time, in which he lives as he was deſigned, and ought to live. The whole of this ſubſtracted may be ſaid to be ſhort to the moſt wary and circumſpect. Much of our time the neceſſities of nature take from us all; much is by multitudes wantonly thrown away, or, which is worſe, conſumed in a vicious manner, making hereby a ſort of draw-back upon the whole, to their unſpeakable loſs and injury. In all ſeaſons of life, we ſuffer things of ſmall moment, or of none at all, to take us off from conſidering its uncertainty, and the continual waſte that is made of our time. Hence we hear one, and another, and all, by turns expreſſing their ſurprize at the days, months, and years, that have ſlipped inſenſibly away. "O "I could not have thought it had been ſo "long! why it appears but as yeſterday!" O thoughtleſs, trifling man! furniſhed with days and years, to mind the concerns of his ſoul, to ſecure and prepare for everlaſting exiſtence, life, and bliſs, and to let them paſs away unnoticed and unregarded; ſo that he ſcarcely knows they are gone. Our paſt years of life are but as yeſterday, when that is paſt, and

as a watch of the night; we are carried away as a flood, or as a ſleep. Thus do our years flee away imperceptibly from us: one morning and evening returns regularly, and dies after another; ſpring, ſummer, and winter, keep their ſtated rounds, and year after year is filled up and gone; and it makes ſcarcely any more impreſſion upon us, than if this morning, or evening, or this year, was the beginning of life.

The clock ſtrikes, and adds an hour to thoſe that are paſt, and takes one from thoſe that are to come. Our pulſe beats, and leaves the number continually leſs; and we think no more about it, than if life and time had no meaſure, or bounds. We hear an idle or an amuſing tale with ſeeming unconcern; it paſſes over the mind, and makes no laſting impreſſion. And thus we ſpend the years of life: they riſe, and ſteal imperceptibly away, and the end of them comes upon us as a thief in the night. We ſpend our years as a tale that is told. I ſhall only add one conſideration more, which may ſhew us the propriety of the repreſentation in our text; and that is,

Fifthly, We are entirely unable to recal our years, when they are gone.

An

An idle and inſignificant tale often devours ſome of the moſt precious moments of life. It is made uſe of to kill that time which hangs heavily upon thoughtleſs men. Often alſo an obſcene and wanton tale has injured the character of the relater, and polluted the ears and hearts of thoſe who have heard it. And how gladly, upon ſerious reflection, would we call back what we have ſaid? but an idle word, a wanton or infamous tale, when once gone out of our mouths, is paſt recalling. How gladly would wicked men, when taking a calm review of life, bring back, if poſſible, thoſe hours and years, in which they affronted God, abuſed his grace, debaſed their own natures, and forfeited their own innocence and honour? And does not the real Chriſtian ſometimes almoſt wiſh to live over again ſome of his paſt days, in hopes that he might act with more wiſdom and diſcretion in them? The moſt cautious and circumſpect minds may perhaps recollect ſome fair occaſions little regarded, ſome ſeaſons of duty and uſefulneſs they ſuffered to ſlip by them unimproved. But theſe once paſt, can never be brought back again. Time and opportunity is not unfitly repreſented with a forelock, but bald behind; ſeize it now, or it is gone for ever: and thus with reſpect to the days

days and years of life that are paſt; they are entirely and irrecoverably gone, and can no more be recalled than a tale when it is once told.

If the Pſalmiſt's meaning has been illuſtrated in the particulars I have mentioned, or if it will in ſome conſiderable meaſure bear that illuſtration, it muſt certainly adminiſter matter of ſerious concern and caution to each of us. This brings me then, as I propoſed,

To point out ſome important leſſons of wiſdom, which ſuch a view of human life naturally, and forcibly, recommends to us.

The firſt that I would offer upon this occaſion is, That we frequently think of the great concerns and buſineſs we have to tranſact in thoſe years of life which heaven allots to us. God has withheld that reaſon and reflection from the other creatures, which he has given to us. Theſe are only, as it were, beings of a day: they appear for a little time, and then probably drop into nothing again. And had we no intimations of a future exiſtence, no forebodings of an hereafter; could we be aſſured, that after fetching a few turns on this temporary ſtage, we ſhould go off like the beaſts that periſh, and be heard of no more; we might be allowed to catch at, and purſue, as much of preſent enjoyments as come within

our

our reach; jovially to paſs away our preſent life; "to eat and to drink, for to-morrow we "die." We might then ſpend the days, months, and years of life as an idle, or merry tale; as void of thought, and care, and anxiety, as poſſible. But, my brethren, how wonderfully different do things appear, when we conſider, and know, that this life is only a ſpan, a ſingle point, to our whole exiſtence: and that all this world can furniſh is as nothing, compared with what we are capable of, and deſigned for. That this body, and nature, whenever it drops and dies, releaſes a ſpirit that may live for ever: that in this world it is only in its minority, its ſchool of diſcipline for a few years; and as it approves itſelf now, it is to obtain or loſe immortal life and bliſs. Thus conſidered, I ſay, how wonderfully different do things appear?

We are here, then, in this ſhort and tranſient life, to improve and perfect our natures, to form an alliance with angels, and to grow up to a meetneſs and capacity for eternal exiſtence and happineſs. Heaven and hell both lie before us, and one or the other certainly awaits us, as we huſband and improve, or trifle with the years of life we here enjoy. Theſe things let us then often remind ourſelves of,

and

and endeavour to imprint them upon our hearts. And may the divine ſpirit make the impreſſion laſting and effectual: that be the years of life many or few, they may be ſpent to thoſe great and intereſting purpoſes for which they were given. Another uſeful inſtruction here offers to us,

Secondly, That we frequently and ſeriouſly enquire how our time goes on, and what the proportion betwixt the buſineſs of life already done, and the years of life already paſt.

The merchant, and tradeſman, keeps his book of debtor and creditor, that he may know upon occaſion how the balance ſtands in any particular caſe; whether againſt him, or in his favour. Something of the ſame practice becomes each of us.

Theſe have alſo generally their fixed times for eſtimating their whole value and ſubſtance, that they may know whether upon the whole it advances or declines. This is the method the children of this world take; pity is it that they ſhould always be in their generation wiſer than the children of light. Certainly we had better adopt their maxims and practices: and there ſeems a peculiar propriety in doing ſomething of this kind at the beginning of every new year.

So

So far then has the goodneſs of God been continued to us, that we may now add to the account of life one year more. But whilſt we expreſs our thankfulneſs to the kind guardian of our lives; if we have hitherto lived to little or no purpoſe, we have reaſon to be alarmed at the loſs we have ſuſtained: for remember we have one year leſs to live, and another to account for. And the beginning of every new year has always this affecting circumſtance attending it, That (as a fine writer expreſſes it) it is the funeral of the former year.

How then ſtands the account with us? "Threeſcore years and ten"—a ſhort number! is the general meaſure and limit of man's life. With reſpect to many, twenty or thirty; with reſpect to ſome, forty, fifty, and ſixty of theſe years are gone: theſe then ſtand on the one ſide, and another year juſt now added to the account. How then ſtand matters on the oppoſite page? What have we done? what progreſs have we made? what profit have we gained? and particularly what have we gained or loſt the laſt year? If we are not more pious, more temperate, humane, and benevolent, more juſt and conſcientious, more dead to the world, and to all ſinful pleaſures and purſuits, more alive to God and goodneſs: and if the ha-

bits of virtue are not improved and ſtrengthened ſince we entered the laſt year, the account will ſtand ſadly againſt us; one year more expended, and nothing anſwerable to be ſet againſt it.

If any of us entered the laſt year without ever having devoted ourſelves to God, and a life of religion, and have continued ſo to the preſent time; the condition of ſuch muſt be moſt deplorable and dangerous. Another year gone, and nothing but a blank ſpace againſt that and all the former years of life. Or perhaps, what is worſe, if the account was to be filled up, theſe blank ſpaces might contain acts of folly and vanity, if not of impure indulgence, ſenſuality, and riot. O ſhameful account for a creature that pretends to thought and reaſon! The debt of life continually increaſing, already ſwelled to an alarming bulk, and the great buſineſs of life not yet begun:—ſo far from it, that, it may be, diligence has been uſed to render it more difficult, laborious, and painful.

On the other hand; if, my brethren, we have the pleaſing conſciouſneſs that, in ſome paſt happy hour of life, we deliberately gave ourſelves to God, and began a life of rational piety and righteouſneſs; if, with advancing years, we have approved our ſincerity and integrity, by doing juſtice, loving mercy, and

walking

walking humbly with God; if this has been the happy caſe with us, we may review the account of life with ſatisfaction and joy. Approved of conſcience, intereſted in the favour of God, and ſecure of a bleſſed immortality; time cannot fly away too faſt, nor the meaſure of our years be filled up too ſoon. For the moment we conclude our courſe of fidelity and obedience here, all peril and temptation for ever ceaſe; and unmixed, and uninterrupted bliſs and felicity then begins. It much concerns us to know how matters are with us in the reſpects above-mentioned; and therefore it is great wiſdom in us, often, and with ſerioufneſs, to take ſuch an account of life as has been here recommended. Another uſeful inſtruction, ſuggeſted from the view of life we have been taking, is,

Thirdly, That we frequently, and with attention, think of the many important and deciſive events, which may ſpeedily ariſe to us.

We are indeed adviſed, and by unqueſtionable authority and wiſdom, "to take no thought "for the morrow:" that is, undoubtedly, not to indulge a reſtleſs and diſtreſſing anxiety about the occurrences and events of to-morrow; but certainly, for all this, ſuch a prudent forecaſt, both duty and wiſdom allow, as will make us watchful and diligent for our future com-

fort and ſecurity; and ſuch a counting upon events which we know we are conſtantly liable to, as may help to arm us againſt, or prepare us for them. A prudent man foreſeeth the evil, and hideth himſelf, or endeavours to be guarded againſt it.

Many proſperous and delightful ſcenes we may have to paſs through: but it is equally certain, adverſity and trial may ſoon be the lot of any, or each of us. We have juſt finiſhed one year, and it may pleaſe God to add many more to thoſe we have already enjoyed. But, for ought we know, this may be our laſt. Within a few months, or weeks, the ſun of life may go down; if not within a few days or hours. If then ſuch important and intereſting events may ſoon ariſe to us, ſerious attention to theſe things may be of advantage, by teaching us immediately to correct what is amiſs; to ſet about what has been neglected; to haſten our ſpeed in the practice of wiſdom and righteouſneſs; and whatever our hands find to do, to do it with all our might.

You, my brethren, who are far advanced in life, are taught, by the common courſe of nature, and by every pain you feel, to live in continual expectation of your diſſolution: and

if

if happily prepared for it, by the habitual practice of virtue and goodneſs, you may expect it with ſerenity and joy. But remember, that as long as any of the moments of life are left, you have ſome buſineſs and duty to do; you are never to think you have ſufficiently attained, or are already perfect, but ſtill to inſpect yourſelves, attend to, and keep the account of life fair and clear, if you would finiſh well, and be approved at the end; your path being that of the juſt, like the opening morning, muſt ſtill ſhine on to a perfect day.

Thoſe who poſſeſs life in all its vigour and ſtrength, may think their mountain now ſtands ſo ſtrong, that it is very improbable, and almoſt impoſſible, a few weeks or months ſhould ſhake or remove it: but alas! how often is it ſeen, that ſome raging diſtemper makes its ſport of the ſtrongeſt and moſt robuſt conſtitution; and, by converting the force and vigour of nature into its own fuel, makes it the means of its more haſty ruin. Let not then the ſtrong man glory in his ſtrength, nor imagine himſelf excuſed from the leſſon here recommended.

But perhaps it will be aſked by the gay and the young, "What application can this mat-
"ter bear to us? We have but juſt entered
"life;

" life; and if life be as a tale that is told, with " reſpect to us, it is but juſt begun; and " therefore, this buſineſs of life, which is ſo " much talked of, the thinking of God and " religion, remembring our Creator, taking " care of our ſouls, and making proviſion for " a future world, and all ſuch grave concerns " as theſe, may, without any imminent ha- " zard, be poſtponed for a while, at leaſt to a " more fit and convenient ſeaſon." But, my friends, the ſlighteſt attention to what paſſes in the world around you, and to the repreſentations given of human life in the holy ſcriptures, forbid any ſuch dependance as this. Do but review the records of death for a ſhort ſpace back, no further than the laſt year, and only thoſe your own memories furniſh, and you will probably remember many beautiful bloſſoms, that juſt opened and cloſed again; many little viſitants to this our world, that, after taking only a ſhort look into it, ſuddenly drew back, and were ſeen no more. And cannot you recollect ſome fair and lovely forms, that promiſed at leaſt an equal duration with yourſelves, but juſt as they were ripening to wiſdom and uſefulneſs, were, by an untimely ſtroke, numbered amongſt the dead? Man cometh forth as a flower, and is, at any ſeaſon

of

of life, as quickly and ſuddenly blaſted as that. Mark the vapour, which juſt appears, and vaniſhes; the ſhadow, which fleets away in an inſtant; the bubble, which juſt ariſes, and breaks; and hence be taught the incertainty and inſtability of human life.

Learn then, and let each of us learn, That not the firmneſs and vigour of a maturer age, nor the vivacity and bloom of youth, can be any ſecurity to us againſt the perils and evils of life; or that this ſhall not be the laſt year we have to live. As ſuch then let us, in ſome meaſure, count upon it, not ſo as to deſtroy any preſent rational enjoyment, or retard any juſt and laudable deſigns, or to torture our minds with gloomy forebodings; but that we may be wakeful and circumſpect as men, as thoſe who have ſome momentous ſtake depending, and may ſeize and improve our hours as they come, conſecrate them to God, to our own laſting ſecurity and happineſs, and be prepared for all events: ſo may this, in the nobleſt ſenſe, be a happy new year to each of us. Amen.

I have only to beg your patience for a few moments longer, whilſt I juſt lay before you the ſtate of that charity, which occaſions our aſſembling together this day.

Preſent State of the Charity-School, in Gravel-Lane, Southwark.

The foundation of it was laid in the reign of James the Second, when one Poulton, an artful Jeſuit, ſet up a ſchool for the inſtruction of children, and gave public notice, that all ſhould be admitted, without exception. This deſign alarmed the friends of Proteſtantiſm, and particularly the three worthy founders* of this Charity-ſchool, and put them immediately upon concerting meaſures, to prevent the miſchievous conſequences of this Jeſuitical contrivance, and to train up the children of the poor in the religion and ſentiments of Proteſtants.

From ſmall beginnings, this benevolent inſtitution is come to its preſent flouriſhing ſtate. Forty ſcholars were at firſt received into this ſchool; theſe have gradually increaſed till they are now two hundred. Here the children are taught to read, and write, and caſt accounts; are inſtructed in the principles of our common chriſtianity, and are trained up to different arts of honeſt induſtry, that they may be qualified for the ſervice of God, and for being uſeful members of the community to which they belong.

* Mr. Arthur Shallet, Mr. Samuel Warburton, and Mr. Ferdinando Holland.

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This may be ſaid to be the firſt public ſchool the Proteſtant Diſſenters have been concerned in; but it has nothing in it peculiar to them. This friendly inſtitution overlooks all the mean and narrow diſtinctions and boundaries of ſects and parties, and aiming at the common good and happineſs, it applies, in common, to all the friends of religion, of proteſtantiſm, of induſtry, of humanity.

It is ſituated in one of the pooreſt parts of the city, and the children of the pooreſt watermen, fiſhermen, and others, are freely admitted to it, are furniſhed with ſuitable books, and all other things neceſſary; and are regularly inſtructed, without any expence to their parents.

An inſtitution like this, of ſuch unlimited generoſity, and ſo extenſively uſeful, I am perſuaded, needs only to be known and conſidered in its ſimple form, to obtain the friendly aid of all who wiſh well to religion and mankind.

If, beſides this, it could need any thing to be ſaid in its recommendation, it would be eaſy to enlarge on the excellency of a benevolent diſpoſition, as it likens us above all things to the Univerſal Parent, who is good to all, even to the evil and unthankful, and whoſe

tender mercies are over all his works, and to the compaſſionate Saviour, who all his life long went about doing good. I might inſiſt on the propriety and expediency of it, from the common weakneſſes and diſtreſſes of human nature: I might urge the ſerenity and joy it immediately introduces to the heart that poſſeſſes and exerciſes it, and the glorious recompence it will meet with at the reſurrection of the juſt. Theſe and many other conſiderations might be mentioned; but they have often and judiciouſly been inſiſted on by thoſe who have gone before me in this ſervice.

You, my brethren, have often heard them with pleaſure, and have felt the force of them; witneſs the friendly aid you give to the charity under our preſent conſideration, and your appearance here this day, ſtill to aid and encourage it. To ſollicit you further, or to beg your continued patronage of this beneficial inſtitution, would be almoſt ungenerous: I perſuade myſelf it is needleſs. Permit me then to thank you for what you have already done; I am ſenſible of its importance, and it is for my brethren and kindred, thoſe of my own nature; therefore I am bound to do this in my own name; but I will venture to thank you in the

name

name of all true Chriſtians, and Proteſtants. I am ſure, I may do it in the name of thoſe dear little ones now before me, whom you have kindly ſought out, and taken under your friendly care, to ſave them from ignorance, ſloth, vice, and ruin; to make them wiſe, uſeful, and happy. In their name then I thank you; and if they apprehend what I ſay, they will join with me; and if their future conduct ſhould be anſwerable to their preſent decent, ſedate appearance, they will think themſelves bound to thank you, whilſt you live; they will revere your memories, when you are dead.

If I would yet add any thing more, it ſhall be in one view to confirm you, my brethren, who have already aided this charity, in your preſent excellent diſpoſitions; but chiefly for the ſake of thoſe who may accidentally have come amongſt us, or who may be diſpoſed to enquire into the merits of it.

And here I would beg leave to take an advantage of the opening year, in connection with the ſubject of that plain diſcourſe I have this day delivered to you.

If then you would ſpend life, and the years of life well, begin every new year with ſome

ſubſtantial act of goodneſs, and conſecrate the firſt openings of it to God; which you cannot more effectually do, than by commiſerating the diſtreſſes and dangers of thoſe around you, and giving part of your ſtore to their ſupport and ſafety. "He that giveth to the poor, lendeth "to the Lord." There is then a beautiful propriety in fixing upon the firſt day of the year for addreſſes of this ſort: you hereby have an opportunity of offering the firſt fruits of what you poſſeſs, with every opening year, as a ſacrifice moſt acceptable to God, and beneficial to your fellow-creatures. And beginning the year with liberality to the poor and helpleſs, you will lay a foundation for joyous reflection in every ſucceeding ſcene of it, and may comfortably hope for the bleſſing of Almighty God upon yourſelves, your families, and upon all you poſſeſs.

In the foregoing diſcourſe, we have been taking ſuch a ſurvey of human life as, if ſeriouſly attended to, muſt adminiſter concern and caution to each of us; and ſome ſuitable inſtructions I have endeavoured to point out, that we might learn how to account of life, and properly improve it.

Next to a ſollicitous concern for ourſelves, we ſhould look around us upon others; and, if poſſible,

poſſible, teach them how to live, make them wiſe and happy. Eſpecially ſhould we be attentive to the riſing generation. Take then, my brethren, as many as you poſſibly can of theſe unexprienced heedleſs travellers, and juſt as they are ſetting out on the journey of life, tell them how to live, furniſh them with ſuitable accommodations, lay before them ſome uſeful plan for life; form them to knowledge and piety, to uſeful arts and induſtry; teach them as fully as you can the value of this life, as connected with, and ſubſervient to, a nobler and more durable life to ſucceed it. If it falls not immediately within your province to do this yourſelves, O refuſe not ſome ſmall contributions to aid an inſtitution where theſe deſigns are carried on. Such is the inſtitution I have this day ſet before you: by this means you will be doing your part, if I may ſo expreſs it, to throw being and ſubſtance into human life, to make that and the world a better thing than ever it has been; to mend and improve the age in which you live, and it may be, ſucceeding ages. But however this be, your benevolent intentions will refreſh your hearts with pleaſing reflections whilſt you live, will embalm your memories when you are dead: and what is in-

finitely more than all this, every labour of love will be kindly and honourably acknowledged at the last great day. "To do good, "and to communicate, forget not; for with "such sacrifices God is well pleased."

FINIS.